The Blue Stone of Old Hartley

The Blue Stone of Old Hartley is a historic stone with a fascinating connection to local folklore, strength and English stonelifting.

Originally believed to have been a Saxon boundary or oath stone, the Blue Stone once stood near the centre of the village of Hartley. Local tradition held that touching the stone could protect against the plague, while later it became associated with good fortune and was reportedly kissed as part of becoming a citizen of Hartley.[1][2]



Figure 1. The Blue Stone of Old Hartley 181-200kg est.

The stone also has a connection to William Carr, known as the “Hartley Samson”. In the late 18th century, Carr is said to have demonstrated his remarkable strength by lifting the stone and carrying it under his arm, adding an early feat of strength to the stone’s long history.[3]



Figure 2. William Carr "The Hartley Samson" – 18th century.

Much of the old village was demolished during the 1940s and the stone was subsequently buried. In 1973, it was recovered and incorporated into a monument close to its original position. A plaque on the monument records its relocation by Whitley Bay Borough Council.[2]

The stone gained a further chapter in its lifting history on 24 May 1999, when stonelifting athlete David Horne travelled to Old Hartley with his son, Jason, for a pre-arranged attempt at the stone. The council temporarily removed the Blue Stone from its concrete moorings for the occasion, while BBC North East Radio attended to record the attempt. David Webster, Graham Noble and a crowd of spectators were also present.[4]

Horne recalls the Blue Stone as one of the toughest stones he had ever attempted. He recorded its weight as approximately 400–440 lb (181–200 kg) and described its surface as extremely smooth and "glass-like". The stone was also awkwardly balanced, with its weight sitting off-centre towards the right and rear, leaving very little for the lifter to grip.[4]



Figure 3. David Horne with David Webster with the blue Stone – 1999.

After failing on his first four attempts, Horne made a final attempt. By positioning his hand further towards the rear of the stone and taking much of its weight through his right wrist, he managed to break the stone from the ground. He recalled the front rising first before the rear came up, with the stone briefly hovering above the ground as spectators shouted that it was up.[4]

Horne described the achievement as one he was particularly pleased and proud of, noting that the effort left him completely exhausted. His account of the attempt was subsequently featured in *Milo Magazine*, Volume 7, Number 2, September 1999, in an article by David Webster titled “High Noon at Hartley: The Blue Stone of Strength”.[4][5]

Following the attempt, the Blue Stone was returned and concreted to its monument outside the Delaval Arms in Old Hartley, where it remains today.



Figure 4. Stone and Monument - Delaval Arms, Old Hartley.

Although the Blue Stone is not a traditional lifting stone in the same sense as some of England's better-known examples, its combination of local history, folklore and documented feats of strength gives it an important place in the story of English stonelifting. The stone is attached to the monument and not liftable today.

It is particularly significant because the 1999 attempt provides a rare modern record of a historic English stone being deliberately made available for a documented lifting attempt, connecting an old local strength tradition with the modern practice of stonelifting.

The Blue Stone of Old Hartley demonstrates how stones can acquire meaning far beyond their physical weight. They can become landmarks, objects of folklore, symbols of local identity and, occasionally, tests of strength passed from one generation to the next.

References

[1] Megalithic Portal — *Old Hartley Blue Stone*. Historical information relating to the Blue Stone and its location.

[2] Megalithic Portal — *Old Hartley Blue Stone*. Information relating to the stone's history, burial, recovery and 1973 re-siting.

[3] Blyth Town — *Willie Carr, Strongman of Blyth*. Historical account of William Carr ("The Hartley Samson") and his reputation for feats of strength.

[4] David Horne — *Our Stonelifting*. First-hand account of the Blue Stone of Old Hartley, including the 24 May 1999 lifting attempt, participants, weight, characteristics of the stone and the circumstances of the attempt.

[5] David Webster — "High Noon at Hartley: The Blue Stone of Strength", *Milo Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 2, September 1999. Account of the journey to Old Hartley and David Horne's attempt at the Blue Stone.

[6] Stonelifitng.org.